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ABSTRACT

School counselors' duties have multiplied over the years, requiring counselors to be involved with nearly every aspect of school operation. Ways in which paraprofessionals can help school counselors meet these demands are described in this paper. Counselors must provide crisis intervention, group and individual counseling, classroom guidance, consultation with other school staff and parents, coordination of community activities, scheduling, record keeping, and a host of other services. Many of these tasks, it is suggested, can be completed by a trained paraprofessional, leaving the counselor available to deal with the increasing numbers of intervention-seeking students. These paraprofessionals, who are trained or skilled in human services, work alongside the professional counselor, serving as guidance aides, clerical aides, and coordination aides. Such duties can then free counselors to fulfill their primary duties, such as the counseling function, the consultation function, and the coordination function, in which they act as a liaison between school and community agencies. Some guidelines for implementing a counselor/paraprofessional relationship are offered. School counselors are advised to persuade administrators that a team approach to counseling can result in more effective service. (RJM)

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Running head: TEAM APPROACH TO SCHOOL COUNSELING

Team Approach to School Counseling: Rationale for the Use of Paraprofessionals

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Abstract

The duties of the school counselor have multiplied over the years, requiring the counselor to be involved with nearly every aspect of school operation (Murray, 1995). The school counselor may provide crisis intervention, group and individual counseling, classroom guidance, consultation with other school staff and parents, coordination of community activities, scheduling, record keeping, and a host of other services. Many of these tasks can be completed by trained paraprofessionals, leaving the counselor available to deal with the increasing numbers of intervention-seeking students.

Team Approach to School Counseling: Rationale for the Use of Paraprofessionals

Responsibilities of the School Counselor

The responsibilities of the school counselor are those tasks and functions that make up the counselor's role. The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) publishes and regularly reviews guidelines for the role of the school counselor. The ASCA guidelines published in Role Statement: The School Counselor (1990), include counseling (individual, small group and large group), consultation, and coordination.

The Counseling Function

The counseling function is defined by ASCA as:

1) individual counseling "...a personal and private interaction between a counselor and a student in which they work together on a problem or topic of interest.

2) small group counseling "...involves a counselor working with two or more students together.

3) large group guidance "...counselors work with students in large groups wherever appropriate because it is the most efficient use of time. Large group work involves cooperative learning methods, in which the larger group is divided into smaller working groups under the supervision of a counselor or teacher."

Counseling is the counselor's primary role (Lamb and Deschenes ,1974). It is the function that counselors see as their ideal role (Furlong Atkinson & Janoff, 1979). According to Bonebrake and Borgers (1984), principals also believe individual counseling to be the ideal counselor role. A study by Wilgus and Shelley (1988) found that teachers agree that individual and group counseling should be given top priority. However, according to Carroll (1993), the

"growing necessity for elementary schools to address the emotional and social problems of all children within a comprehensive, developmental model suggests that the teacher-instructional role of the elementary counselor is more important than ever" (p.218).

The Consultation Function

The consultation function is the liaison between counselor, student, parent and school. "The counselor as a consultant helps people to be more effective working with others. Consultation helps individuals think through problems and concerns, acquire more knowledge and skill, and become objective and self-confident" (ASCA, 1990).

Morse and Russell (1988) in a study of actual and ideal counselor roles found that counselors rank the consultation function high among tasks performed. Counselors would like to be significantly more involved in consultation with parents and teachers. Tennyson, Miller, Skovholt, and Williams (1989) found that the configuration of the school (Junior/senior high or separate junior and senior high) determined the degree to which the counselor actually consulted with parents. According to Wrenn (1962), consultation with adults involved in the lives of students might be more useful than counseling with the students themselves.

The Coordination Function

The ASCA school counselor guidelines (1990) state that "coordination as a counselor intervention is the process of managing various indirect services which benefit students and being a liaison between school and community agencies". Kameen, Robinson and Rotter (1985) in an examination of coordination activities, found that conflict exists between the ideal and actual functions of the school counselor. Furlong, Atkinson and Janoff (1979) found that counselors desire to spend less time doing noncounseling activities such as student discipline. According to

Cole (1988), "coordination became more important to the school counselor as services for students proliferated within the school and as referral resources outside the school became more available" (p. 132).

Counseling, consultation and coordination functions require the counselor to customize a program of children- centered activities that help students to learn more effectively and efficiently. These guidelines are child-focused and require the professionalism associated with the counselor's position. However, administrators who are unaware of how to use their school counselors effectively, may ask counselors to provide quasi-administrative duties such as restroom and hall monitoring, and developing the school's master plan (Murray,1995). Although the role of the school counselor has undergone many studies, (e.g., Lamb & Deschenes, 1974; Biggers, 1977; Morse & Russell, 1988; Tennyson et al., 1989) definitive role tasks have yet to be agreed upon (Partin, 1993).

The diverse needs of student populations make it necessary for school counselors to have as their first priority the ability to provide individual and group counseling. According to Carroll (1993), the current need for group work with children will increase. Schmidt (1996), suggested that any task that removes the school counselor from the essential function of providing direct services to students, parents, and teachers should be eliminated or reassigned. To whom should these tasks be forwarded? Menacker (1974) suggested that the school counselor work as a team with other staff including clerical assistants, volunteers and paraprofessionals.

The Paraprofessional

Paraprofessionals are individuals trained or skilled in human services, with less than professional qualifications, who work alongside the professional counselor (Cassell et al., 1973).

These individuals, after being trained by the counselor and briefed on the counseling program, can assist the counselor in noncounseling and guidance related tasks. Paraprofessionals should have good communication skills and have helping skills that complement the services of the counseling program. San Francisco Unified School District administers a paraprofessional basic skills proficiency examination to individuals interested in paraprofessional positions. "This test helps school officials to determine if the applicant has the appropriate skills necessary for the paraprofessional position" (L. Lewis, personal communication, March 6, 1997).

Paraprofessionals can serve as 1) guidance aides to assist with dispensing information through the counseling center; 2) clerical aides to assist with the growing amount of paperwork with which the counselor must contend including referrals, scheduling, notices to parents, and correspondence to community organizations; and 3) coordination aides to assist with needs assessment, distribution and collection of standardized tests, monitoring students, and planning and conducting awards ceremonies. San Francisco Unified School District uses paraprofessionals in various capacities including preparing and maintaining records, publicizing educational development programs, as well as monitoring halls and the cafeteria. Additionally paraprofessionals organize workshops, implement parent projects and participate in the preparation and distribution of brochures, newsletters and other educational materials that inform parents, school staff, students and the community of school policies and other issues related to school and student welfare (L. Lewis, personal communication, March 6, 1997). Chicago Public School District uses paraprofessionals as counselor aides who perform the clerical tasks required within the counseling office. In Chicago, the majority of the paraprofessional positions are "non-funded", which means that building administrators use discretionary funds to purchase

paraprofessional positions. According to Dr. Linda Henry, senior advisor to the school counseling unit in the Chicago Public School District, (personal communication, March 12, 1997), counselor aides are " very useful" and are valued employees within the school buildings. Paraprofessionals can be used to perform a number of other counseling related tasks. A St. Charles County, Missouri school district uses special clerks to handle their career centers (P. Weis, personal communication, March 19, 1997). Similarly, according to Zunker (1996), paraprofessionals are used in university career centers to assist with career guidance, including administering surveys and other assessments.

There are advantages to using paraprofessionals to complement the school counseling program. Paraprofessionals require less formal training than professional counselors. Paraprofessionals can plan meetings with parents, teachers and students and act as liaisons between the school and community. The use of paraprofessionals can increase the effectiveness of the counselor by providing services to a larger number of clients. The most important advantage to having paraprofessionals under the counselor's supervision is that the counselor would have a resource person to help with those routine clerical chores that prevent the counselor from providing direct services to students, teachers, or parents. Menacker (1974) wrote of the paraprofessional:

> There is probably no area where the growing acceptance of paraprofessional roles in education is as cogent as in urban guidance...the use of paraprofessionals allows for the cooperation and direct participation of indigenous community people so vital to the strength and success of the urban guidance program. These nonprofessional workers can serve to reduce the confusion and conflicts in values, perceptions, and goals that exist

between urban schools and various communities they serve (p. 225).

The relationship of the counselor with the paraprofessional should be one that involves teamwork and a clear understanding of what tasks each individual must perform. It is imperative that paraprofessionals know their limitations. Paraprofessionals must be able to accept their role and understand the roles of the counselor and other staff members within the school building (Schmidt, 1996). "Where problems have been encountered, they have generally involved paraprofessionals wanting to become involved in counseling activities. These problems can be handled through critique and closer supervision" (Cassell et al., 1973). It is also important that the counselor not assign tasks to paraprofessionals that are beyond their skills and abilities. The counselor must understand the supervision and management role and the ethical obligation to effectively coordinate the activities in the guidance office based upon the ethical standards as presented by the American School Counselor Association (ASCA, revised, 1992).

Plan for Implementing Counselor/Paraprofessional Relationship

A. Define the role tasks of both the counselor and the paraprofessional.

Even though guidelines for counselor roles are provided by the American School Counselor Association (ASCA), and the National Occupational Coordinating Committee (NOICC), State Departments of Education and local school boards, the counselor's role differs from state to state and school to school. The paraprofessional may handle the large amount of clerical and other housekeeping functions that are necessary for the fully functioning school counseling program. The paraprofessional may coordinate such activities as open house, career day and awards programs. Further, the paraprofessional may serve as a community link,

sharing information about school activities with the community at large.

B. Write a job description for each position.

Written job descriptions help to differentiate between various roles and help to make clear, the many responsibilities associated with the counseling program personnel.

C. Provide space and resources for the paraprofessional in order that time and efforts are effectively and efficiently used.

The paraprofessional needs a permanent office or other designated space where specific materials and resources can be stored for ready access without having to constantly interrupt the school counselor. This space should accommodate easy access to the counselor in order to facilitate the flow of information and to encourage communication concerning evaluation of the counseling program.

D. The counselor must train the paraprofessional to ensure that the individual has the proper skills necessary to carry out the role tasks assigned to this position.

The usefulness of the paraprofessional will be greatly enhanced if the counselor trains the paraprofessional in the skills needed to facilitate the counseling program. The paraprofessional must have some basic knowledge of consulting, mediation, referral, and coordination competencies. A process of training, supervision and evaluation will ensure maximum benefit of the use of the paraprofessional.

E. The paraprofessional should be introduced to and provided orientation with other school staff in order to make them a part of the school team.

Team building with other school staff builds a sense of belonging, cooperation and

involvement in unified efforts. The team approach brings about a better understanding of the school environment for all involved.

F. The counselor retains responsibility for coordinating the efforts of the counseling program.

Regular meetings or consultation time should be provided for the counselor and paraprofessional. This process will solidify the efforts of the counseling program and ensure that both counselor and paraprofessional are serving the needs of the school clientele.

G. Include paraprofessional efforts in needs assessments and program evaluation.

It is important to conduct a comprehensive evaluation in order to determine the needs of the program, school and community. The paraprofessional is an integral part of the counseling program and should be involved in evaluation design (e.g., suggesting community survey participants) as well as its implementation.

Summary

A great help to the counselor would be the availability of paraprofessionals to assist with the numerous noncounseling and guidance related tasks that the counselor is often asked to perform. With the complex nature of students' problems warranting more interventions tailored to the students' needs, it is necessary for the school counselor to work with a building-based team of professionals and paraprofessionals and to develop a referral network within the community. Research indicates that counselors, administrators and teachers believe that individual and group counseling should be the top priority of the school counselor. Partin (1993) wrote that:

"Administrators, students, faculty, and legislators must be persuaded that the school's best

> resources are best used and students best served when counselors' time is safeguarded from clerical, administrative, and menial duties and preserved for those professional functions for which they have specialized training" (p. 280).

According to Baker (1996), the only way school counseling can achieve its own identity is to pursue change through professional organizations that represent school counselors. The school counselor should take the initiative by persuading school building and district administrators that collaboration and a team approach to school counseling is the most effective means of providing a fully functioning school counseling program.

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